

# AN AMERICAN

BY ELEANOR M. INGRAM

A GIRL'S laugh floated up through the dusk; a bubble of sound golden and perfect as the round moon that drew itself slowly from the clasping clouds of the horizon.

"And the canoe, Frank! Ah, do you remember the first trip in that canoe?"

"Certainly I remember. What a very small girl you were and yet how very hastily the canoe upset when you stepped on the edge! But you were not much frightened, for you asked my name and challenged my nationality before we were fairly ashore."

"No, no. Only Billy and I had been quarreling over the question and I wanted to know. You admit that your name does not sound American."

"Oh, names——"

The smooth young voices rippled into laughter together, the light steps died away on the graveled walk. Upon the high veranda one of the listeners stirred uneasily.

"Who is with your sister, Billy?" he inquired.

"Frank Savello, sir," answered the young man in the lounging-chair.

"Why is he here so often?"

The question was both vague and unexpected. Billy paused for lazy meditation.

"I rather think he has been here pretty often for six or eight years. We used to go to school together, and now we have been going to college together. He is through with that, though; he worked so amazingly hard. He was always one of Delight's chums, you know. Frank is—all right."

"Certainly, as your companion. Perhaps not as Delight's. He is a foreigner."

"Beg pardon, sir; he was born right here in the village. His father teaches chemistry in the Academy."

Mr. Ellison made an impatient movement and lapsed into silence.

"I wish," he stated after a moment, "that you would find Savello and ask him to come here before leaving. I desire to speak with him."

Ethan Ellison's manner always possessed a finality rather more than regal. His son rose to obey according to life-long training and strolled placidly down the wide stairs. Billy seldom disturbed himself to think or to draw inferences.

It was a very different figure from his plump one, that presently came up to the veranda. The moonlight was stronger now and plainly showed the visitor's lithe grace of movement, the brilliant glance and smile that were indeed not quite Anglo-Saxon.

"You sent for me, Mr. Ellison?" he questioned in his warmly inflected voice.

"Yes," there was a little hesitation. "Pray, be seated; I have to speak seriously. You will understand that in my position and family frankness becomes a habit, I might say a courtesy. It is concerning Miss Ellison that I wished to see you."

Savello started slightly. He remained standing by the pillar instead of accepting the offered chair, yet his attitude held the reserve of dignity rather than deference. He was twenty-one and Billy was twenty-three, but his host consciously addressed himself to a man, not a boy.

"My daughter is scarcely nineteen years old, and of course does not consider such affairs as this. It is for your sake, Mr. Savello, that I have thought well to



Delight

observe that her future is already engaged."

"May I ask how?"

"You know enough of the history of my family to realize that it imposes a certain obligation upon us all. This is not Europe, but we have our traditions. Delight must marry an American. Pray believe there is no personal question in this."

"I am an American."

The descendant of many Americans stiffened in his chair.

"You were born here, yes. Your parentage——"

My father is a Florentine gentleman and scientist whom political difficulties

sent here; my mother was a Venetian of the highest caste. What of them?"

"Both Italians?"

"Yes."

"I have said that Miss Ellison could only marry an American."

"You mean an Anglo-Saxon of New England ancestry."

The point was too fine. Mr. Ellison looked at the firm young face, wavered, and let the retort pass; resenting it doubly because he found no answer.

"We have discussed this absurd affair quite enough," he declared in chill obstinacy. "I am not forced to allude to your lack of fortune or Delight's youth; the barrier is clearly evident. And since nothing but harm can result from your friendship, it must cease. Of course I have no power over your actions; if you will not give me your word not to see or write to my daughter, I must send her away. Neither she nor her family will be happy if she is forced into exile, but if you make it necessary I have no choice. I had no idea that matters had gone so far."

He halted with indignant interrogation, waiting. Savello did not move; besides all deeper things, his large bright eyes held a delicate scorn of the other's battle-axe clumsiness of warfare. It was an instant before he replied:

"Certainly I have no wish to exile Miss Ellison, or cause her the faintest vexation. Pardon me for suggesting that your conception of love is somewhat—odd. For you are perfectly right: I love her. For the rest, I myself am going from here to commence my work; as Billy could have told you. And I will engage to leave Miss Ellison free from word or presence of mine until I come back and warn you that the truce is over." He broke off, as if listening; a

change crept into his tone. "Until I come back. Which will not be until your reasonable objections have been removed, but which nevertheless will happen. One does not bend every energy and concentrated thought to a single purpose without success. I shall come, and I believe I will find her waiting."

"You have spoken to her of this?" exclaimed Mr. Ellison, stupefied and enraged. "You, you have told her your feeling?"

"Why, no. I should have considered that unfair. That was left for you to do, sir."

"For me!"

Savello turned with his vivid smile.

"The ears of the heart are very keen," he said, the accent a caress.

Mr. Ellison followed the glance, and saw the girl who stood among the heavy shadows at the head of the steps. A motionless white figure, she drooped against the railing; her small head turned toward Savello, her small hands clasped together.

"Delight!" cried her father.

She heeded him not at all; it seemed that the deluge of revelation had left but one person in her world.

"Delight!" he repeated angrily. "You were listening, you heard?"

"Yes, I heard," she answered. "I—heard."

No more than that; but Savello lifted his head before a knowledge too perfect for exultation, and Mr. Ellison gasped with the unaccustomed and stinging consciousness of having made a mistake not to be recalled.

"Very well; since you have listened to my explanation I need not repeat it. You at least have been too well taught not to understand me. Mr. Savello is leaving this part of the country; pray, wish him good night and go in."

She said nothing, in the dusk it was not possible to see her expression. Impulsively Savello crossed the space between them; not touching her as he stood

opposite, yet holding her with the grasp of his own resolution.

"You knew I was going away, Delight," he said. "You know now that I am coming back, and why. I have much work to do; day and night, hour by hour, moment by moment, I shall do it with the thought of you here. I meant to go in silence, I go now asking no promise of you. If you can forget or change, I would not hinder it. I am just so proud that I want nothing except what is my own. But we know each other very well, you and I; better than most people ever know any one, and I am not afraid. When I return there will be no barriers between us, that at least I can say."

"Can you change your nationality?" demanded Mr. Ellison, suffocated.

"I have no need," was the retort. "I am your fellow countryman. Perhaps you will grow broader minded with the years, sir. But when I come back it will be for Delight, unless she herself forbids."

Half an hour before they had laughed and chatted in the old sweet intimacy, touched hands in sport or passing assistance with all natural frankness; now she only dared meet him with her wonderful eyes, eyes dark as his own in the uncertain light, but earnest and splendidly rich in meaning. Savello leaned forward and gently took the handkerchief crushed in her fingers.

"*Il est petit, mais il est en dentelle.*" It is good-bye, Delight, for a while. Only for a while, unless you wish otherwise. And I hope with all my heart that you will be happy, while we are waiting and afterward."

Before the witnesses, for Billy had followed his sister and stood amazed upon the steps, he would not raise the bit of linen to his lips or offer a sign of why he had taken it; only the young girl comprehended the quotation and that her handkerchief, like *Roxane's*, was to be a battle-flag. The guest saluted Mr. Ellison and went down the stairs.

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Just where the Hudson River widens lazily into the Neapolitan beauty of the Tappan Zee, just where the stately crags of the Palisades relax into smiling terraces facing the northeast, nestled Ethan Ellison's home. Ever since the century before the Revolution the square, high-columned house had stood here; built from massive brown blocks of native stone, nature had accepted it as part of the landscape and given it her counter-sign to pass unscathed the gauntlet of the years. And from 1698 to 1908, no master had dwelt there except an Ellison. There was much excuse for the father of Delight. He had inherited his prejudices as she had inherited her quaint family name.

The place had not changed in the nineteen years since Delight's mother had slipped out through the door by which her baby girl was entering; there was no reason why there should be change during the weeks after Frank Savello went down the stairs in the dusk. Yet river and sky and mountains never again looked quite the same to one of the household. A few days after her awakening, Mr. Ellison had spoken curtly of the subject to his daughter.

"This is all nonsense, this affair of young Savello. I have watched you grow from childhood; you are like Billy in disposition, you want a thing violently for a short time, and then forget it altogether. We are going to spend this winter in Florida, and when we come back you will laugh at this folly."

Delight moved her head in quiet denial. She was a typical American girl, bronze-haired, gray-eyed, with an appealing delicacy and slightness, and perhaps more of gentle maidenliness than is quite modern.

"No," she answered. "I might have been like that, indeed, if I had not known Frank. He has strength enough to spare me some. Out there somewhere he is working— No, I shall not forget."

"You at least have sufficient dignity

and sense of duty not to cause a scandal by leaving me for this man."

"Yes, I would not do that. Nor would he; he promised you to stay away."

He looked at her, and ventured no further. A long silence shut in between them and that theme.

The first year they went to Florida. The second they passed in Europe. Delight was interested, passive, even gay. Satisfied to see her like her young companions and not at all like the tear-dissolved Delphines and Amandas of romance, Mr. Ellison asked no more and settled back to the monotonous life he preferred. They traveled no longer and passed their third winter in New York. Three years—the disturbing incident was buried under the falling days.

But it was just before they returned to Ellison House that spring, that Billy was vouchsafed a glimpse beneath the surface. Driving through Broadway one morning with his sister, he was startled by her suddenly rising in the carriage with a cry that soared above the din of traffic.

"Frank! Frank!" she called passionately. "Oh——"

Scandalized, he dragged her down beside him with fraternal roughness.

"Delight! What are you doing? What is the matter?"

She turned to him fiercely, her clear eyes blazing with excitement and tears.

"It was Frank. Stop the carriage and let us follow; he could not hear me. Down that street he went. Oh, Billy, he looked paler, older. Billy——"

"By George!" said Billy weakly. "But you know you don't care about him any more. You know you are cured."

"I shall love him all my life," she flashed. "Take me, take me, dear; only for a moment take me."

And Billy yielded so far as to drive through the street she indicated. But they found nothing.

The next day the family returned to the Hudson. Billy was both too good-natured and too idle to repeat the knowl-



edge he had gained, so Mr. Ellison continued unenlightened as to his quiet daughter's thoughts. Not being himself of the ecstatic temperament, he considered placidity the pinnacle of happiness; and she was gently serene.

The fourth year passed. It had come to be accepted that Delight Ellison was rather a serious girl, although a sympathetic and charming companion. Her small circle of girl friends loved her a little differently from the way they cared for each other; they always demanded her presence when deeper feelings reigned for the hour. They always wanted her at their weddings. Her return from a visit where she had acted as bridesmaid for the last member of her school class, first roused Mr. Ellison to uneasy recognition of certain facts.

"Delight, your friends are nearly all married," he observed finally. "You yourself must be almost twenty-four."

They were seated on the broad veranda in the afternoon sunshine, and Delight answered without looking up from her sewing:

"Quite twenty-four, father."

"You have many acquaintances; Billy brings home his friends; I—I should like to see you interested in some of them. The women of our family have always married early, and well."

A faint color flushed her fair, sensitive face.

"I have no thought of such things now."

"Why not?" he asked harshly.

"You sent Frank away; I can only wait."

After the silence of years the name was spoken between them, and spoken with a readiness that betrayed how familiar it was to her thoughts. Mr. Ellison staggered before the unexpected.

"You have heard from him? You see him?" he exclaimed, too practical to grasp an intangible affection.

"No; I wish that I had." She leaned back wearily and let her eyes rest on the shading purple and turquoise of river

and hills. "But I know that he is at work, and I wait."

"Italians are fickle and forgetful; he probably does not recall your existence," he retorted with the brutality of exasperation.

"He is an American," she corrected, her smile delicately aloof. And after a moment, "I read once that no one climbs the steps to success unless there is a lure at the summit. I am very proud to stand at the summit of Frank's steps."

Her father stared at her in that aggravated obstinacy that is more merciless than anger. It seemed to him that they had slipped back four years.

"We will begin over again," he declared icily.

He did begin over again, with new tactics. They stayed at Ellison House that year. One of Billy's college men had recently met Delight, and gave her all that she gave Savello. He was sincerely and earnestly in love, he was a New Englander *de pur sang*; Mr. Ellison came enthusiastically to his aid.

With that the last refuge of peace failed Delight. She was left no solitude, no repose. Somehow Miles Allen was always near her, always her escort, always a guest at the house. Her friends commenced to rally her upon his constant attendance and ostentatiously to search her left hand for the telltale ring. Delight held her head high, but her beautiful eyes grew larger and very wistful as the spring once more flowered into summer; the fifth summer since Savello had gone with her handkerchief for oriflame.

"Some one has been building a house on the old field above the water lily pool," Billy announced one day at luncheon. "A New York man, I believe. A handsome house, too; it shows well from the river. Have you seen it, Delight?"

Allen was there, as usual. Delight murmured some incoherent reply and bent her head to hide the childish rush of tears. A house on the field that Frank had nicknamed "Cloth-of-gold" for its



Not you, but I, am the American

wealth of buttercups, where she had so often sat chin in hand while he robbed the tiny pool of its odorous, roseate lilies. No one noticed her pallor; they were all hungry and absorbed in the business of the hour. The sense of utter isolation chilled her to a strange, swift resentment and helplessness.

Later in the day a shrinking desire to see the thing she hated, sent her out to the long unvisited place. Yes, it was true: the house was there and nearly completed. A delicious house; a house of creamy adobe, with wide sunny windows and deep cave-cool verandas. Not too large, yet large enough for a dainty stateliness all its own.

"At least you are pretty," Delight sighed to it as she gazed. "One can almost forgive you because of that. You

are more than pretty. You, you are like a house some one dreamed."

The house looked back at her tranquilly; a mere débutante of a house with all its life yet blank. Like a débutante, it was being adorned and surrounded with flowers; already the workmen were decorating its gardens and lawns. After a little while she went home.

The next week Billy returned to the subject, this time when he was alone with his sister. It was a rainy afternoon, the steady drip from eaves and gutters pattered a dreary accompaniment to his voice.

"That new house—I asked the contractor this morning and he could not tell me who owned it, but I learned who was the designer. It was Frank Savello. You know he is growing quite famous

here lately; they say he is the most original architect in the city. Funny, how much you used to fancy him, and now it is Allen. Girls are odd. That big new hall that is going up in New York, he is doing that." He cast an investigating glance at the girl in the shadowed corner. "Last week at a directors' luncheon in the Club, he and father were both guests. Neither of them made a sign of trouble. Frank asked after you coolly enough. He is cured of the old ideas as well as you are; he never even winced when father answered that your engagement would soon be announced."

Delight swayed to her feet, catching at the frail tea table for support and scarcely hearing the musical crash of overturned china.

"He told him—that?"

"Yes; why not? Every one knows how Allen stands with you. Why, Delight!"

She held out her hands to him as he sprang forward, lifting a face of such white passion and grief as few of her calm race had ever felt.

"It is not true, it is not true. You will tell him so. Billy, you will find Frank— Oh, to have him think that—"

He let her lean against him and mechanically stroked her soft hair, too stunned to offer comfort as she sobbed helplessly.

"But I thought it was Allen; every one thinks so. You have kept him around, you know."

"Never, never. They would have it so. I tried to show them. You will find Frank to-morrow; you will tell him?"

Billy grew rigid with disapproval. He was plump and idle and modern, but he was none the less an Ellison.

"I can hardly hunt up a man and tell him my sister is in love with him. Consider that you have not seen him for five years. Be sensible, dear; why, he did not even change color when he heard of your engagement. Men are—different; they forget."

"Not Frank. Listen; he promised not to write or see me, but once each year there comes to me a basket of those water lilies we used to gather when we were children. He has not forgotten. You will tell him, Billy; you will not let me lose him like this after so long? Only what was his own, he said—if he should think that—"

He shook his head pityingly; too solidly masculine to bridge the years with lilies.

"It would not do. I am sorry, little girl. You had better be sensible and take Allen, as you meant before I spoke."

She drew away from him, still trembling in the reaction from long self-restraint.

"You will not tell him?"

"I cannot."

"You are an Ellison," she said quietly. "I wish I were anything else in the world. No; do not touch me for a little while."

The rain fell steadily, monotonously; early twilight darkened over the room. Left alone, Billy shivered and remained standing there for many moments. For the first time in his life he was essaying the art of putting himself in another's place, and not enjoying it.

That evening Miles Allen proposed to Delight, and was definitely dismissed. There were three people in Ellison House that night who never again heard the insistent beat of a summer storm without the stir of half-awakened pain. The economies of Nature do not include love; Allen wasted a very real affection.

Later, when Delight slowly climbed the stairs to the refuge of her own room, Billy met her on the square landing.

"You understand about Frank Savello," he said, finding a hesitating difficulty in expression; verging on humility. "You know I could not do that. I am sorry; it is hard for you."

She gazed at him, her large, dark-lashed gray eyes holding weary indulgence; indulgence for a novice in emotion. Her delicate evening gown trailed



down the shining stairs with their polish left by many such light steps as hers, her small hand grasped the balustrade across which so many small hands had slipped seeking support.

"Yes, I understand, Billy. We are not ourselves, you or I or father; we are just substance forced into the mold of this house and name. You cannot help it, nor I. But it is hard for the women, yes."

He moved mutely aside to let her pass. On the highest stair she lingered.

"How it rains! Good night. I—it is too much, that rain."

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The next morning Delight did not come down to breakfast, so did not see her father until his return in the evening. And however chagrined at her dismissal of Miles Allen, Mr. Ellison found no word of censure when he first saw her on the sunlit veranda. She lay too listlessly in her armchair, she was too white and passive for attack. The lustrous bronze curls had a brightness almost insolent in contrast to the transparent pallor of the forehead round which they clustered. In silence he sat down opposite her.

The evening was very still. The puff of a tiny launch floated up drowsily from the silver and rose-colored river, the blossom-like clouds hung in the sky with the effect of waiting for some kindly wind to take their hands and lead them home to east or west. Country and mountainside were composed to serious expectation of the coming night. After a while Billy came out to join the two on the veranda, and lapsed into equal silence after a brief exchange of greetings. Unconsciously both men were watching the girl, who heeded neither. Over in the east a pale moon grew into sight, patiently biding its hour when the overwhelming brightness of the sunset should fade.

Some one was coming up the graveled walk; some one as yet concealed by over-arching trees, but whose firm, even step

sent a shock of anticipation through the quietness. Billy turned that way, Delight lifted her head with a startled question flitting across her face. The guest was at the stairs——

He had altered very little, the Frank Savello who stood once more on the columned veranda; he carried his hat in his hand and the air had touched his dark hair to the old boyish roughness, his dark eyes passed over the group with the old rich warmth of glance. He made no offer to break the hush that had fallen upon them all, his attitude suggested no need of welcome, only at Delight he looked for an instant that scattered the empty years like chaff. There was no outcry, no exclamation.

Mr. Ellison first recovered, and rose.

"Mr. Savello, this is unexpected," he began, clinging to conventionality with the desperation of one who has no other rules for life.

The other turned his gaze upon him with utter self-possession.

"Why so?" he demanded. "I told you five years ago that I should make this visit. But perhaps you had forgotten; you see, I have thought of nothing else. I gave my word not to seek Miss Ellison without your knowledge, so I come openly."

The challenge was direct. Mr. Ellison gathered all the obstinacy and dignity he could command.

"Five years is a long time to remember a childish scene. The reason why you should not seek Miss Ellison is one that cannot change or be withdrawn. My daughter must and will marry an American. Your business successes do not affect the matter."

Savello lifted his head, his fine dark face locked with a suggestion of steel.

"Good; she shall. Five years are a very long time, indeed; let us compare just how long, before I go. What do you know of life or the battle, you who have been secure in comfort all your days? Five years to do what other men consider well done in fifteen or twenty



"Yes, I heard," she answered

—that was my task. I have had no leisure to spend in slow building of my success; I, for whom Delight waited. I had my college training, no other aid. My father died the spring I left here, and I stood alone. Five years—the first I was sometimes hungry, but I made a step.

The second, I fell ill and lost it. The third year—but I bore you with these details. I only speak to show you that I have not passed the time idly or in pleasant cultivation of prejudices. *You* claim Delight; prove an equal right to mine."

Ethan Ellison opened his lips, and

closed them again; he was actually shaken by the power of strong indignation and pride in the opponent.

"You are vehement, Mr. Savello," he parried, reaching futilely for the dignity of rebuke.

"I have cause. Now the last word. Not you, but I, am the American. Would you cramp all this superb country into your narrow measure; would you crush the splendid West, the vivid South, the pulsating North, back into the original thirteen states? Look out, look wider: the people of the United States to-day are the new Americans, the children or grandchildren of Europeans. Why, would you attempt to fill a continent from your tiny stock? Do you think you give the country more than we of earnest service? Do you think your placid patriotism is more than the wealth of love and gratitude we spend on this country where we were born? Have no fear; it is an American who, having given the promised warning, claims his own." He turned to Delight and held out his hand. "Come," he said.

Her eyes had never swerved from his face since the first moment; it was color and youth and light that had flowed visibly through her whole frame, as some rich crimson wine is poured into a vase of pale crystal. Doubt, dread of his distrust, shriveled away before the high, luminous confidence of his regard. Now, her wide eyes still on his, she rose and walked to his side.

"Delight!" her father commanded inarticulately. "Delight——"

Savello passed his arm around her waist and faced the two men.

"A little sooner than I had intended, a story told me forced to-night. But all is ready. Over on that hill I have built my house. It lacks nothing you desire, my Delight; the rooms wear the colors you preferred, the garden holds the flowers you loved best—not your lightest

fancy has been forgotten. Oh, I drew the plans of our home when the very paper meant less food or fire; while I lay in the hospital I pictured each dainty detail where you should dwell. And now it is fact, but for your presence. In our drawing room is waiting your own old clergyman. To our wedding I bid your kinsmen, if they choose, and offer welcome; but you are mine, not theirs."

"Delight!" cried her father again, yet somehow awed by the splendor of the two faces in the rose and amethyst light.

She shook her head, leaning closer to her lover.

"Not any longer," she said, her silver voice falling strangely across the heavier tones. "Not Delight Ellison any more; just the girl who is Frank's."

They went down the steps, his arm still about her, her bright head touching his shoulder.

They had quite disappeared when Billy sprang up.

"What is it?" the other asked dully.

He halted at the head of the steps in his first and last defiance of tradition.

"I am going there. I—Delight is twenty-five, poor child. I am going to see my sister married to an American, sir."

Mr. Ellison looked around the empty veranda. A cricket commenced to chirp in the grass, the place was struck with a sense of desolation.

He was American himself, American enough to bear no resentment for Savello's lesson and even to acknowledge its truth. After all, the question had never been personal; he had always liked his young antagonist. He felt almost with relief the sudden conviction that the Ellison dignity demanded above all the prevention of this romance becoming public. If Delight were married without him——

Presently he rose and went slowly down the stairs after his children.